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1.9  
In 348  
Housekeepers' Chats

Tuesday, January 20, 1931

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "More About Convenient Kitchens."  
of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Information from the Bureau

Bulletins available: "Convenient Kitchens" and "Farm Home Conveniences."

--ooOoo--

Faithful to her word, my Next-Door Neighbor came over this snowy morning to continue telling me about what she calls her project in creating a comfortable kitchen. With all these experts saying so much about efficiency and convenience in the kitchen, my neighbor feels that the item of comfort has been neglected. And, she says, that since she spends such a large part of every day of her life in her kitchen, she wants comfort there, quite as much as in any other room in the house.

Yesterday, after much persuasion from Uncle Ebenezer and me, she told me how she was arranging her kitchen to provide comfortable illumination. Some heavy, dark curtains, that she had been using, cut off the daylight that her three perfectly good windows should have been supplying, so she substituted thin, inexpensive washable ones of a pleasant yellow shade, which would let in more light and give an impression of sunshine even on cloudy days. Then she repainted her dark gray walls a creamy yellow to reflect the light. Finally she put in two new light fixtures, one to supply light to her stove and another to direct it on her sink and work table which are placed near together.

That was all of the story she had time to tell me yesterday, but she promised to finish it today and, sure enough, over she came this morning just in the humor for a real chat.

"Where was I," she inquired "when I stopped talking to you and Uncle Ebenezer yesterday?"

Uncle Ebenezer's voice from the hall replied, "You were discussing the lighting of your kitchen and how you made it comfortable by avoiding both gloom and glare. I may be just a mere man, but I will say that I am interested in your ideas about kitchens"

That was a real compliment from Uncle Ebenezer and my neighbor knew it, so she replied, "If you aren't too bored with the subject to listen to a little more, I'd like your ideas about the rest of my project."

Uncle Ebenezer looked very pleased and immediately seated himself on my wooden kitchen stool, lit his pipe, and prepared to enjoy the conversation.



So my neighbor began, "After the walls, curtains and lights were planned, the floors came in for consideration. Floors, I am sure, may have a lot to do with tired feet and aching backs. And the right kind of finish may prevent a lot of hard work, scrubbing and cleaning. My kitchen floor has really been very long-suffering. The first year we lived in this house, we left it unfinished. That was a dreadful mistake. What with splinters, grease spots and constant sweeping and scrubbing, I was almost worn out. The wood, you know, simply absorbed grease whenever any was spilled, and, try as I would, I couldn't make that floor look clean. Then we oiled it with linseed oil. A good enough inexpensive finish. But the splinters still remained and a good deal of cleaning is required. Finally, we tried painting and varnishing. Paint has its advantages, price being one of them. But I've never been really satisfied because a finish like paint wears off so quickly. What I have wanted was a durable, easily cleaned, non-absorbent covering that would be resilient and comfortable to stand on. The stone floors of our grandmothers' day and the cement and tile floors made today have some of these qualities, but are so hard that it is tiring to stand on them. For comfort, a floor should have some give and elasticity to it."

"What have you finally chosen for the floor?" asked Uncle Ebenezer

"Linoleum. I believe that is one of the best all-around floor coverings, for the average home. More expensive than paint or oil, but far more lasting and comfortable. I've had the linoleum laid over deadening felt and cemented to the floor, which, I understand, is the correct way to put it down for permanence."

"Good," Uncle Ebenezer commented at this point.

My neighbor continued. "Did you ever hear any of these kitchen efficiency experts talk about proper working heights, Aunt Sammy? I have. I've read about them too. But somehow the idea never seemed to percolate in my head until I began thinking about comfort. Backs naturally get tired bending over. If the sink is low, you have to bend over while you stir up cake, or knead the bread, or roll out pie-crust. If the ironing board is low, you stoop all the time you are doing the ironing. Yet in half the kitchens I know all these working surfaces are placed below the comfort point. That used to be the case in my kitchen, but I am proud to say, it is no more."

Uncle Ebenezer inquired how to tell what the right height is, and my neighbor suggested experimenting, perhaps with boxes of different sizes, until a suitable height is found.

"It's this way," she said. "Just what the right height for every individual housewife is, depends on her own height and build, particularly her length of arm so that she can reach her work conveniently without stooping. The different kitchen activities also require different levels. By a few tests of different jobs at various heights, anyone can find out what height is best for sink, table, cabinet, and ironing board. There are, of course, lists published that give approximate heights based on general measurements, but it is more satisfactory to experiment."

Just then a picture came to my mind of two friends of mine who both use the same kitchen. One is tall and the other is very short and inclined to be plump.





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So I asked, "What are you going to do about these working heights, if a tall person like yourself must use the same kitchen with a short person?"

My neighbor laughed, and said, "You answer that question, Uncle Ebenezer."

"If I were arranging things, I would place the equipment to suit the taller and provide a stool or platform for the little one, if necessary. I suppose you know that you can buy ready-made kitchen tables and cabinets with exchangeable legs of various heights, and others that can be adjusted with blocks."

"And the sink," continued my neighbor. "The sink should be placed with the greatest care since it is very difficult to change the height, once the plumbing has been put in. The working surfaces to be considered here are the drainboards on either side of the sink and the bottom, not the rim. However, a good average height often recommended is thirty-six inches from the rim to the floor."

"Now let me mention two other little items for comfort--toe room and knee room. I'll bet Aunt Sammy, that even you didn't consider toes and knees when you planned your kitchen."

"Where did you get the idea?" I asked.

"Right out of that bulletin you have been recommending so heartily--that kitchen bulletin. Shall I tell you what it taught me about toe comfort and knee comfort?"

"By all means."

"Toe room, it says, should be allowed under all equipment at which the worker must stand. Sometimes this can be provided by having the working surface extend four or five inches beyond the line of the base, or by having the equipment raised above the floor on legs. Cabinets or tables with solid bases can be recessed, perhaps four or five inches, to give comfortable toe room. Then, when it comes to sinks or tables, where the housewife often sits down to do her work, they need knee room. A sliding or hinged leaf on a table will provide for knees very nicely."

"Look at the time. I've been talking steadily for what seems like an hour and I haven't half described my kitchen yet. You two must come over to see it this very afternoon. By that time I hope I'll have the hems in my curtains. Oh, I've forgotten to tell you about my rest corner. One kitchen stool and a straight uncomfortable chair never did satisfy me as the only rest centers in my kitchen. So at last I've installed an easy chair like yours. Aunt Sammy, right in the corner by my south window, and beside it I have a small, low table that will hold magazines or a little sewing basket. When I'm tired I can take a few minutes off for relaxation in my rest corner."

Tomorrow: "Outdoor Play on a Chilly Day."

